

The Bald Eagle and the Garuda
A History of American Encounters with the East Indies in the 18th and 19th Centuries

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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the history of the pepper trade between Salem, Massachusetts, and the island of Sumatra. It attempts to fill the gap in historical knowledge of America's early relations with Southeast Asia prior to its colonization of the Philippines in 1899, and covers the period from 1799 to 1846. The paper also discusses the implications that trade with Southeast Asian polities had on American foreign policy in the early period. The paper argues as well that American merchants' arrival in the East Indies represented the weakening of the Dutch East India Company's monopoly on the spice trade in Southeast Asia, which eventually ended in the company's bankruptcy, the takeover of the East Indies colony by the Dutch crown, and a permanent change in Dutch policy that emphasized territorial conquest as a means of securing Dutch control over the archipelago.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Harry Chandra Suwanto was born in Houston, Texas and grew up in Indonesia. He graduated from the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 2013 with a Bachelor's degree in History before coming to Cornell University in 2015 to pursue a Master's degree in Asian Studies, focusing on Southeast Asia and Indonesia in particular.

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For my parents, Antonius Suwanto and Annita Chandrah, who never give up on me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

USS: United States Ship, prefix assigned to all ships of the US Navy

VOC: Vereinigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, the Dutch East India Company (literally
“United East India Company”)

PREFACE

The history of the United States has mainly been taught in high schools and universities through the lens of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis that places America's expansion to the west as central to the shaping of American national identity. While this is certainly true for much of the 19th century, it was not as certain in the earlier days of the United States. There was just as much push towards America becoming an overseas trading nation as there was towards the eventual Louisiana Purchase and Manifest Destiny.

Such was the condition of the young republic at the beginning of its existence, still busy finding its footing in the world. There was, however, as much enthusiasm between both the pioneers who headed west and the merchants who went overseas in search of their fortunes. While much has been written about the former, there is still precious little study about the latter, especially about early American pepper trading ventures in Southeast Asia pre-1898.¹

As an imperial power, the United States came very late into the colonization game that dominated the late 19th century. Its most serious attempt to expand far overseas remained the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection, during which it acquired lasting foothold on the region now known as Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, this has meant that to a large extent the conquest of the Philippines has overshadowed other American ventures in Southeast Asia that, though not as large as the European ones,

¹ I have chosen the time range of roughly a century or so between 1797 and 1898 as the focus of this thesis, and particularly 1799-1846. 1797 marked the first successful voyage of an American vessel to Southeast Asia, and 1898 is, of course, the year the Spanish-American War broke out, at the end of which the United States took over the Philippines. However, the pepper voyage records in the impost book at the Peabody Essex Museum's Phillips Library extended only from 1799 to 1846.

arguably shaped American interest in Southeast Asia. However, even the Spanish-American War itself is not universally known among students in present-day United States.

So it should not surprise anyone, therefore, that the pepper trade that begun in 1797 between Salem, Massachusetts, and the Aceh Sultanate in what is today Indonesia, as well as the United States Navy's punitive expedition to Quallah Battoo² in 1832 has become virtually lost to American historical memory. Today the prevailing assumption among students of American history is that their nation was not interested in serious overseas ventures in Southeast Asia until 1899 or 1941, even then mostly in the Philippines without including other parts of Southeast Asia.

This paper attempts to fill that knowledge gap, and argues that almost from the very beginning of the United States' existence, individual Americans and the American government alike took an active interest in Southeast Asian affairs, focused on the island of Sumatra, even if this interest is merely an extension of American interest in trade with Qing China.³ This is apparent from the time the first Salem trading ships called on Aceh's ports all through the 19th century. Obviously the shores on both sides of the Malacca Straits were dominated by European powers, Britain and the Netherlands, but the United States did manage to leave its lasting legacy behind as well in the form of commercial and diplomatic relations instead of colonial subjugation.

² Due to time constraints it has not been possible to track down the native Acehnese names of the locations mentioned in this paper. Suffice to say that the way American sailors spelled these place names depends on the preferences of each account's individual writer.

³ "Milestones: 1830–1860 - Office of the Historian," accessed May 10, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/china-1>. This article is a concise introduction to American commercial interest in East Asia.

The Salem Pepper Trade, 1793-1846

To understand the context in which the United States became involved in the East Indies, it is necessary to trace a sketch of the trading relations between the port of Salem, Massachusetts, and the ports of the Aceh Sultanate on the very northern tip of Sumatra. One commodity in particular drew many American traders to Sumatra, and that is pepper.

Today, this spice is a ubiquitous presence alongside table salt in restaurants all over the world. At the beginning of the 19th century, however, acquiring pepper was dangerous and difficult not only because of the distance, but also because of the strict Dutch control over the spice trade by virtue of their presence in the East Indies. But foreign traders did attempt numerous times to get around this monopoly and bypass the Dutch middlemen.

It is this pepper trade and its impact on both America and Southeast Asia that this thesis will focus upon. Within the context of a Southeast Asia that is being slowly colonized by the Dutch and British, American arrival in Southeast Asia marked not just a curious footnote in United States history, but also a turning point in how European colonial powers expanded their spheres of influence in the region. Three consistent patterns emerged once America's presence entered into Southeast Asian waters:

- (1) The arrival of the Salem pepper ships and their successful voyages challenged Dutch spice trade monopolies in the East Indies and was a sign, if not a cause, of the Dutch East India Company's (hereafter VOC) collapse.
- (2) The VOC's collapse in turn marked the permanent shift of Dutch priorities to territorial expansion in addition to trade monopoly.

- (3) US Navy warships followed American merchant vessels due to pirate attacks, and the possibility of American expansion of influence in Southeast Asia accelerated Dutch colonial conquests in the region.

This thesis will also raise these three themes as well, in order to highlight the importance of America's role in the Southeast Asian trade network and its impact on colonial empire-building. There is much work still to be done to document the early history of American-East Indies relations, and I welcome all corrections to this thesis.⁴

Background: History of the Pepper Trade

The Salem-Sumatra pepper trade was a period in which there was considerable, sustained relations between the United States and Southeast Asian polities. Yet it was only one part of an already intense exploration of East and Southeast Asia by American merchants, missionaries, diplomats, and naval officers. A 1972 article by Ronald Spector highlighted American interest in Southeast Asia well: "More than a decade before the United States concluded its first treaty with China, Edmund Roberts had negotiated, and the Senate had ratified a treaty with Siam, the first American treaty with an East Asian nation."⁵ Such an occasion is rare, and it certainly did not happen within the context of the East Indies archipelago. Whereas Siam had the benefit of a central government, the

⁴ The problem of terminology is always present in the writing of any history, so it is difficult to determine what terms to use as descriptors. I have avoided using the word "Indonesia" to describe the East Indies archipelago, since it has now taken on the meaning of the modern nation-state's name. In addition, I have also retained throughout this thesis the American renderings of native Acehnese personal and place names.

⁵ Ronald Spector, "The American Image of Southeast Asia 1790-1865, a Preliminary Assessment," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1972): 299-305. 299.

unification of the East Indies would not take place until 1945.⁶ Thus American merchants in the East Indies conducted their businesses with local rulers on an individual basis. Even in Aceh, at the northern tip of Sumatra, where a Sultan held power, real governance was actually done by local chiefs in their enclaves along the coasts.

Traders from New England dominated the pepper commerce, especially those from Salem, Massachusetts. The roots of this pepper trade actually went back to before independence in 1654, when Elihu Yale, the famous founder of Yale University, “sent two of his employees to Atjeh ... to establish the pepper trade.”⁷ However, between 1654 and 1797 no trade was recorded, so perhaps Yale did not succeed in his intention to open up the pepper commerce.

That task would finally fall to Captain Jonathan Carnes; some 20 years after America declared her independence. This was a time of turbulent changes in Europe that saw the French Revolution and the rise of the First French Empire, in addition to the American Revolution itself. Consequently, an enterprise aiming to establish trade between North America and Southeast Asia needed to navigate not just the perils of the long voyage and pirates, but also European powers fighting with each other or, in the case of the Quasi-War and the later War of 1812, against the United States.

Sometimes, however, these European powers would also utilize American vessels' services to their advantage, especially during times of American neutrality. In his study of America-East Indies Trade, *So Great A Proffit*, James R. Fichter writes that, “In 1795, authorities in the Netherlands hired an American vessel to make the Cape and warn

⁶ The Dutch had more or less completed their colonial conquests and drawn territorial borders with other colonial powers by 1912. Another 50 years would pass before newly independent Indonesia absorbed the last remnant of the Dutch East Indies in New Guinea in 1962.

⁷ “Salem Massachusetts - Municipal Information At a Glance,” accessed May 24, 2016, <http://www.salemweb.com/community/city.php>.

the incoming Dutch East India Company fleet of war with Britain. French officials returning from Ile de France, hoping to avoid stints as prisoners of wars, often made the trip on American vessels. Americans and other neutrals carried correspondence around the Indies and between the Indies and Europe for France and her allies”⁸

But to return to Captain Carnes, there is as yet no full-length biographical treatment of his life. What is known, however, reveals that he came from a family that is already involved in the pepper trade, being “a nephew of Jonathan Peele, a substantial East India Merchant.”⁹ Carnes was only 31 years old when he went on his first, exploratory, voyage to Sumatra on board the brig *Cadet* in 1788, but he must have been an experienced captain of exceptional skill, for he not only discovered the route to the pepper ports of Sumatra, but also managed to return again with profit in 1797.¹⁰

The *Cadet* departed Salem in April 1788, and by May she stopped at Madeira in Portugal. Thereafter she disappeared from the records, only to show up again in February 1790 at the Cape of Good Hope. She finally made it back to the United States not at Salem but at some other port, perhaps New York or Boston.¹¹ There is no clue to where the *Cadet* went between 1788 and 1790, but Carnes’ supercargo and brother-in-law William Vans Jr. later published an autobiography where he claimed “they visited Bencoolen, Tappanooley, and other pepper ports on Sumatra and brought home pepper, camphor, gold dust, and spices.”¹² All of these are signs that Carnes’ voyage had borne fruit, and thus the missing records can be simply explained as a case of a captain and his

⁸ James R. Fichter, *So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010). 167.

⁹ James Duncan Phillips, *Pepper and Pirates: Adventures in the Sumatra Pepper Trade of Salem* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 1949). 9.

¹⁰ Ibid. 1-2.

¹¹ Ibid. 2-3.

¹² Ibid. 4.

crew keeping a trade secret. Carnes had laid down the foundations for a trade that would contribute significantly to Salem's prosperity, so much so that even in 1889, long after the last pepper ship entered Salem's harbor,

“Every school boy in Salem knew where Java and Sumatra were. They had learned it at the knees of a grandfather who had probably been there himself but if he had not, he had heard them talked of for years.”¹³

His exploratory voyage a success, Carnes then decided to take another ship east, this time one by the name of *Grand Sachem* owned by Elias Hasket Derby.¹⁴ The voyage, however, ended when the *Grand Sachem* was wrecked at Bermuda.¹⁵ By 1795 Carnes was ready to sail again to the East Indies. His ship, the schooner *Rajah*, was loaded with “two pipes of brandy, fifty-eight cases of gin, twelve tons of iron, two hogsheads of tobacco, and two boxes of salmon.”¹⁶ She was crewed by the following men:¹⁷

¹³ Ibid. 5.

¹⁴ Ibid. 8.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. 10.

¹⁷ Peele Family Papers, MH 5, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass. (As the date shows, this attestation was made at the completion of the voyage, meaning that the *Rajah* sailed out of Salem, into Sumatra, and returned to New York to keep his trade route a secret).

August 26 1797 Attestation of the Brig “ <i>Rajah</i> ”’s crew by the Public Notary Charles Adams:				
Name	Station	Native of	Actual Abode	Aged About
John Snelling	Mate	Newfoundland	Salem	25
Samuel Silver	Second mate	Massachusetts	Salem	28
Benjamin Webb	Seaman	Massachusetts	Salem	22
Jonathan Richards	Seaman	Massachusetts	Salem	31
John Bishop	Seaman	Massachusetts	Salem	23
Scipio How	Seaman	Massachusetts	Salem	29
Benjamin Nick	Seaman	Massachusetts	Salem	16
Stephen Phillips	Passenger	Massachusetts	Salem	30
John Rambanz	Cabin Boy	France	France	‘
Done at the City of New York				

Table 1: Attestation of the *Rajah*’s crew made upon the ship’s arrival in New York. It is not known if any crewmembers died during the voyage, so this list may not reflect the crew she departed Salem with.

And Carnes’ instructions from his employers for this voyage is as follows:¹⁸

Salem, November 3rd 1795

Capt. Jonathan Carnes,

Our schooner *Rajah* now being ready for you will proceed from here directly to the Cape of Good Hope and then make all possible dispatch in disposing of your iron and lumber and purchasing Cape wines, with which you will proceed to the coast of Sumatra and thee dispose of them with your brandy, gin, and botty (?) and with the stock you which you will then have

¹⁸ Ibid.

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on hand load your vessel with pepper or any other kind of spice or produce that you may think it for our interest to purchase. If at your arrival in Sumatra the crop should be sold to that you cannot obtain a cargo of pepper you will employ the right in freighting or any other way which you shall think most for our interest till the next crop comes on. If you are able to obtain a cargo of pepper on your first arrival you will load as soon as possible and make the greatest dispatch back with your cargo to New York. If the price of pepper on your arrival should be so high as that you think it best not to purchase you are at liberty to use the right you shall think it most for our interest, always evaluating that while you are freighting you are risking all our stock and taking care that the freights are sufficiently advantageous to pay for that risk. Should you be convinced that a deviation from these orders in any case would be most for our interest you are at full liberty to depart from them. You may make your calculations from the prices current and mixed which are the purchase prices in America and from which they will not face more than 30 p. cents in considerable quantity should be imported. Wishing you a prosperous voyage we are your friends and business.

(Signed) Jonathan a Peele

Ebenezer Beckford

Willard Peele

From the instructions above, it is clear that Carnes' employers fully trusted him with every detail regarding the voyage, and gave him plenty of leeway on how he should manage the *Rajah's* journey. Absent in the instruction is any consideration about cultural differences between the Americans and Acehnese, revealing perhaps the merchants' assumption that Carnes had already acquainted himself well with the local Acehnese during his time on the *Cadet*. And once again, as with that earlier voyage, there are no records that detail the journey after the ship reached a certain port, only to reappear again once it approached America. James Duncan Phillips speculated that after the *Rajah's* last sighting off the Cape of Good Hope in 1796,

“Carnes and his little company probably headed northeasterly from the Cape before the gentle tropical breezes of the Indian Ocean and came far more comfortably to their destination. From Bencoolen he could have warily nosed his way among the coral reefs along the coast inside the outer islands, or he may have gone around outside it all and struck in at Tappanooley or wherever he had learned pepper was available.”¹⁹

Phillips further suggested that Carnes probably went to several ports to fully load the *Rajah* with pepper, and had to wait for two harvests before he could finally set off on his return trip to Salem.²⁰ The voyage went well for Carnes, and there are no records of altercations with pirates, but the *Rajah* did encounter a ship that showed hostility in the

¹⁹ Phillips, *Pepper and Pirates: Adventures in the Sumatra Pepper Trade of Salem*. 10-11. These two places today are Bengkulu and Tapanuli in modern Indonesia. American cartographers and sailors of the 18th and 19th centuries usually made up their own spelling of place names in Sumatra, some of which are still recognizable today.

²⁰ Ibid. 11.

darkness of night while at anchor somewhere off Sumatra. Only after a skirmish that left their bow watch wounded did the Americans discover that their opponent had been the French privateer *Resolute*.²¹ Having lost one officer, the French apologized for the trouble, and the *Rajah* sailed away without further trouble until it reached New York harbor. Again, this is most likely how Carnes kept his trade secret, and although it was not very long before other traders discovered the route to Sumatra, Carnes was able to lead at least one more voyage to Sumatra in 1799 before he had to face competition.

The Dutch: Conspicuously Absent?

Carnes' voyages revealed not just a coveted profit-making commerce route, but also how easy it was to trade with the Acehnese and bypass VOC monopoly. The fact that the Dutch did not appear at all in the available records of the 1795-1797 and 1797-1799 voyages shows that Dutch monopoly failed to cover the western coasts of Aceh, and that its ability to enforce its economic and territorial claims had severely diminished. Still, Dutch presence alone was enough to convince Carnes to seek out alternate trade routes to bypass the Dutch authorities.²²

Dutch rule over the East Indies had been undergoing a decline for some time.²³ More than twenty years before the United States declared its independence, the Dutch

²¹ Ibid. 13. The French mistook the *Rajah* for the British brig *Persia*, perhaps their intended target.

²² A short overview of the VOC's history can be found at "1602 Trade with the East: VOC - Timeline Dutch History - Rijksstudio," *Rijksmuseum*, accessed May 10, 2017, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/timeline-dutch-history/1602-trade-with-the-east-voc>.

²³ The Netherlands' administration of the East Indies more often than not relied on local princes and regents who were effectively vassals of the Dutch crown, as shown in Multatuli's novel *Max Havelaar*. This system of indirect rule meant that colonial government could be effective in some areas such as Java, but unenforceable in other areas without military control, such as Aceh.

committed the 1740 Batavia Chinese massacre.²⁴ This upheaval led to a rebellion against VOC rule by both the Chinese and Javanese, and ended with a Dutch victory, but at a heavy cost. The rebellion meant that the company was by 1797 an already spent force, well on its way towards bankruptcy.²⁵ Coupled with the instabilities of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and the French takeover of the Netherlands itself, it meant a power vacuum in the East Indies that threatened Southeast Asian commerce for European traders.

This situation proved profitable for American ship captains. Since the United States was a neutral party during the first years of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, the Dutch government in Batavia came to rely on American shipping for people and goods alike. Fichter explained that,

“Between 1795 and 1805, Dutch authorities hired twenty American merchantmen to run from the Netherlands to Batavia; nearly 300 additional American vessels arrived at Batavia in the same decade. Many brought colonial products back to the United States, often to be sold on to the Netherlands. Others sailed from Java to the Netherlands without Dutch

²⁴ English-language sources for this specific event is scarce, but two full-length studies, one in Indonesian, and one in Dutch (also translated into Indonesian) give an excellent background as to what occurred. They are, respectively, Daradjadi, *Geger Pacinan, 1740-1743: Persekutuan Tionghoa-Jawa Melawan VOC* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2013) and Johannes Theodorus Vermeulen, *De Chineezten te Batavia en de troebelen van 1740*. (Leiden: Ijdo, 1938).

²⁵ Fichter, *So Great a Proffit*. 160. The Dutch East India Company had already effectively collapsed in 1795, though the Batavia High Government retained much of its administrative framework until the Dutch crown officially took over governance of the colony in 1800. Fichter wrote that, “some US merchants, confused at how much like the old system this looked, continued to refer to the “Company” on Java, but in fact the Dutch Company, as a shipping concern, no longer existed.”

sanction, flaunting the Dutch government's monopoly, in theory at least, on the authorization of direct trade between colony and metropole."²⁶

Could it be that Carnes gleaned some of his initial knowledge from these Americans hired by the Dutch? This was not the first time that a European power's foreign contractors took over trade from their employers; two centuries before in 1595, a Dutchman by the name of Jan Huyghen van Linschoten published a detailed account of trading routes from Europe to the East Indies copied from the top-secret records of his Portuguese employers.²⁷ This information leak was soon translated into English as well, and was a crucial factor in eventual Dutch success over the Portuguese in the East Indies. If Carnes knew about Linschoten's book, the irony could not have been lost on him.

The Peak of Salem-Sumatra Commerce, Other American Ventures in The East Indies

Carnes returned from Sumatra with a cargo that yielded 700 percent profit.²⁸ In the first of his series of books on Salem's maritime history, George Granville Putnam notes down the cargo that the *Rajah* carried back from Sumatra as follows:

"She next entered the Salem Custom House, October 15, 1799, her cargo consisting of 158,544 pounds of pepper, 28 pounds Hyson tea, nankeen and

²⁶ Ibid. 161-162. Phillips also devoted the entire third chapter of his book to an American pepper ship that went to the Deshima Dutch factory in Nagasaki, Japan, illustrating the important role that American ships played in facilitating Dutch commerce.

²⁷ Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *John Huighen Van Linschoten, His Discours of Voyages Into Ye Easte [and] West Indies: Deuided Into Foure Bookes* (printed at London by Iohn Wolfe, printer to ye honorable cittie of London, 1598). I.

²⁸ Phillips, *Pepper and Pirates*, 14.

China articles, the duties being \$9,512.64 on pepper, \$8.96 on tea, 15 cents on nankeen, and \$1.08 on china articles, a total of \$9,522.83.”²⁹

In addition, some of the articles that Carnes carried back with him to Salem (a small chalice, double-ended smoking pipe, and a whale’s tooth) became the start of what is now the Peabody Essex Museum.³⁰

Such a large return would inevitably arouse the interest of other merchants, Predictably other ships began to race towards Sumatra’s pepper trading ports. Accurate statistics on this trade are hard to come by, but it is certain that Salem’s pepper trade brought very large returns that are enough for numerous American trading ship captains to make the dangerous journey.³¹

News of Carnes’ successes galvanized other Salem traders, and thus the pepper trade steadily grew, booming at the height of the Napoleonic Wars when the Netherlands could not enforce its claims on the East Indies archipelago. The following table illustrates the progression of the pepper trade up until the imposition of the 1807 embargo.³²

²⁹ George Granville Putnam, *Salem Vessels and Their Voyages: A History of the Pepper Trade with the Island of Sumatra* (Salem, Massachusetts: The Essex Institute, 1924). 8.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. “Between 1799 and 1846, 179 ships sailed between Salem and Sumatra, with even more landing their cargoes in other European or American ports.”

³² The Salem Custom House Records, MH 261, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.

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No. of Impost Book	Date of Entry	Name of Vessel	Where From	Amount of Duty
	Dec. 31 1798	Aggregate Duties (for the year)		\$2,032,912.21 $\frac{3}{4}$
2	Oct. 10 1799	Brig <i>Rajah</i>	Sumatra	\$9,522.83
2	Dec. 7 1799	Bark <i>Eliza</i>	Batavia	\$19,353.28
	Dec. 31 1799	Aggregate Duties		\$2,488,933.66
3	Oct. 22 1800	Brig <i>George Washington</i>	Sumatra	\$1,803.09
3	Dec. 10 1800	Brig <i>Exchange</i>	Batavia	\$11,448.41
	Dec. 31 1800	Aggregate Duties		\$3,060,319.54
3	Jan. 12 1801	Ship <i>Sally</i>	Batavia	\$16,036.71
3	May 22 1801	Ship <i>Henry</i>	Samarang (Semarang?)	\$16,419.43
3	July 18 1801	Brig <i>Rajah</i> Pepper	Sumatra	\$8,938.46
3	July 29 1801	Ship <i>Belisarius</i>	Bencoolen	\$20,357.16
3	Oct. 15 1801	Ship <i>Franklin</i>	Batavia	\$29,709.40
3	Nov. 7 1801	Ship <i>America</i>	(Muckie?) Sumatra	\$56,348.82
	Dec. 31 1801	Aggregate Duties		\$3,741,598.83 $\frac{3}{4}$
3	Jan. 31 1802	Ship <i>America</i>	Sumatra	\$112.24 m.

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		(Nov. 7 1801)		pepper
3	July 13 1802	Ship <i>Belisarius</i>	Sumatra, Isle of France	\$20,910.48 m. pepper, coffee
3	July 19 1802	Ketch <i>Three Friends</i>	Batavia	Sailed to another port
3	July 28 1802	Ship <i>Henry</i>	Batavia	\$17,029.43 coffee, pepper
3	Aug. 19 1802	Bark <i>Eliza</i>	Mookee (Muckie?)	\$21,497.38 pepper, coffee
3	Aug. 28 1802	Brig <i>William</i>	Batavia	\$8,106.23 shoes, sugar
3	Nov. 5 1802	Brig <i>George Washington</i>	Sumatra	\$508.50 pepper, coffee, molasses
	Dec. 31 1802	Aggregate Duties		\$4,234,282.30 $\frac{3}{4}$
3	Jan. 22 1803	Ship <i>Prudent</i>	Travical(?)	\$1,932.40 pepper
3	Sept. 12 1803	Ship <i>Cinnatus</i>	Sumatra	\$18,992.44 pepper, coffee
3	Sept. 21 1803	Ship <i>Belisarius</i>	Sumatra	\$17,749.44 pepper

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3	Sept. 22 1803	Ship <i>Minerva</i>	Sumatra	Pepper, proceeded to foreign port
3	Nov. 1 1803	Brig <i>George Washington</i>	Sumatra	\$16,518.87 pepper
3	Dec. 10 1803	Ship <i>John</i>	Sumatra rc	\$144.99 indigo, coffee
3	Dec. 27 1803	Ship <i>Putnam</i>	Sumatra – Isle of France	\$27,634.67 pepper, coffee
	Dec. 31 1803	Aggregate Duties		\$4,978,360. 25 $\frac{3}{4}$
4	Feb. 19 1804	Ship <i>Franklin</i>	Batavia	\$29,666.96 coffee, pepper, sugar
4	May 19 1804	Ship <i>Herald</i>	Batavia	\$27,532.93 coffee, sugar, molasses
4	July 5 1804	Ship <i>Hope</i>	Batavia	\$26,475.28 Pepper, coffee, sugar
4	July 18 1804	Ship <i>Henry</i>	Batavia	\$16,611.09 Coffee, sugar, pepper, wine

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				(?)
4	Aug. 2 1804	Ship <i>Recovery</i>	Batavia	\$22,423.85 coffee, sugar, nutmeg, coffee, sugars
4	Aug. 24 1804	Ship <i>Cincinnatus</i>	Sumatra	\$416.40 coffee, sugars
4	Oct. 23 1804	Brig <i>Sukey</i>	Sumatra	\$620.47 pepper, coffee, indigo
4	Nov. 23 1804	Brig <i>Hope</i>	Sumatra	To Leghorn
	Dec. 31 1804	Aggregate Duties		\$5,787,613.50 $\frac{3}{4}$
4	Jan. 19 1805	Ship <i>Good Hope</i>	Sumatra, Isle of France	\$19,195 pepper, sugar, bottles (?)
4	Jan. 22 1805	Schooner <i>Freedom</i>	Sumatra, Isle of France	\$17,179.52 coffee, cabbin (?), indigo, pepper
4	Jan. 23 1805	Brig <i>Aurora</i>	Sumatra	\$474.21 pepper, sugar, coffee

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4	May 22 1805	Ship <i>Franklin</i>	Batavia	\$29,664.62 coffee, sugar, pepper
4	June 14 1805	Brig <i>Sally</i>	Batavia	\$8,841.17 coffee, sugar, candy (?)
4	July 6 1805	Brig <i>Argus</i>	Batavia	\$7,024.80 coffee, pepper, nutmeg
4	Aug. 10 1805	Ship <i>Janus</i>	Batavia	\$21,231.42 sugar, coffee
4	Aug. 19 1805	Ship <i>Cincinnatus</i>	Sumatra	No goods landed
4	Sept. 28 1805	Ship <i>Recovery</i>	Batavia	\$19,670.56 coffee, sugar, indigo, wine, bottles, shoes
4	Nov. 11 1805	Ship <i>Eliza</i>	Sumatra	Proceeded to Leghorn
4	Dec. 2 1805	Ship <i>Concord</i>	Sumatra	\$4,424.22 pepper, coffee
	Dec. 31 1805	Aggregate Duties		\$6,807,320.22
4	Apr. 31 1806	Ship <i>Henry</i>	Batavia	\$12,514.08

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				coffee, sugar, mace
4	Aug. 14 1806	Barque <i>Eliza</i>	Sumatra	\$22,279.91 coffee, pepper
4	Aug. 26 1806	Ship <i>Janus</i>	Sumatra	Proceeded to Europe
4	Oct. 20 1806	Ship <i>Union</i>	Sumatra	\$28,506.26 pepper
4	Nov. 10 1806	Ship <i>Cincinnatus</i>	Sumatra	\$20,286.66 pepper
4	Dec. 30 1806	Ship <i>Lousia</i>	Padang	\$18,545.18 coffee, pepper, cassia, coffee, cloves, raisins
	Dec. 31 1806	Aggregate Duties		\$7,901,336.20
5	Feb, 3 1807	Ship <i>Argo</i>	Calcutta + Batavia	\$19,533.43 sugar, tobacco, bottles
5	Oct. 5 1807	Ship <i>Eliza</i>	Sumatra	\$66,903.90 wine, pepper
5	Oct. 6 1807	Ship <i>John</i>	Sumatra	\$22,098.50 pepper,

				coffee, cassia
5	Nov. 2 1807	Ship <i>Cincinnatus</i>	Sumatra	\$20,820.00 pepper
5	Dec. 18 1807	Ship <i>Louisa</i>	Sumatra	\$35.64 pepper
5	Dec. 28 1807	Ship <i>Eliza</i>	Sumatra	\$35.64 pepper
	Dec. 31 1807	Aggregate Duties		\$8,992,328.40

Table 2: Record of impost, taken from digest of duties, for East Indies bound ships from the *Rajah's* first entry in 1799 to the year 1807 when President Thomas Jefferson imposed his embargo act. Thereafter the pepper trade declined into sporadic voyages until it ended permanently in 1846.

These records show the contribution of the pepper trade towards Salem's and ultimately America's economy. By 1807 there was extensive American maritime commercial activity in the Dutch East Indies in the form of the pepper trade and shipping service business. From 1799 to 1836 traders from Providence, Rhode Island also participated in the commerce on Java, showing how American maritime merchants from different states vied for the lucrative trade in the Dutch East Indies.³³ Batavia became a frequent destination for American vessels, so much so that on November 24, 1801 the United States Government opened a consular office in the city.³⁴

But the booming trade did not last very long. After peaking in the years 1805 and 1806, as can be seen from the table above, President Thomas Jefferson signed the 1807

³³ Sharom Ahmat, "Some Problems of the Rhode Island Traders in Java, 1799-1836," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 6, no. 1 (1965): 94-106. To my knowledge this is the first study on the subject of Rhode Island merchants in the Dutch East Indies.

³⁴ "Indonesia - Countries - Office of the Historian," accessed May 12, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/countries/indonesia> and "Bilateral Relations – Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia | Washington D.C.," accessed May 12, 2017, <https://www.embassyofindonesia.org/index.php/bilateral-relations/>. Unfortunately there seems to be no trace left in modern Jakarta of where the site of this consulate is since American relations with the East Indies remained sporadic until after the latter formally became Indonesia.

Embargo Act that effectively crippled the Salem-Sumatra pepper trade and the Rhode Island Java trade.³⁵ Neither ended immediately as a result of the embargo, but both trades irreversibly declined, and five years later the War of 1812 doomed the fate of American-East Indies commerce.

The First US Military Intervention In Asia

Why did the pepper trade between Salem and Sumatra go so well for so long and produced so much profit? Most likely the primary reason for the smooth transactions has to do with the fact that American ships came as independent merchants rather than representatives of large monopolies exemplified by the Dutch or British East India Companies. Company traders often had government backing in enforcing their role as middlemen, driving prices up, frustrating pepper suppliers and buyers alike. Acehnese traders would also have resented these monopolizing European companies' aggressive policies that often led to territorial conquest, and so welcomed American merchants that came with purely commercial interest. For the American merchants, this meant that they could purchase pepper directly from local suppliers, bypassing Dutch middlemen and Dutch duties alike. Their persistence in pursuing the risky trade bears testimony to the Protestant work ethic that Max Weber expounded upon in his classic study.

Hence it was a shock to the Salem merchants when news of one of their ships' hijacking became known. What had exactly happened?

³⁵ "The Embargo Act of 1807," accessed May 12, 2017, http://www.napoleon-series.org/research/government/us/c_embargo.html. The embargo did little to harm its target Britain but greatly damaged American overseas commerce.

The *Friendship* Incident

The date February 7, 1831 would mark a turning point in the Salem-Sumatra pepper trade. On that day, the American trading vessel *Friendship* called on the port of Quallah Battoo to conduct pepper business. What happened next was to cause uproar half the world away. After Captain Charles Endicott and a few members of his crew came ashore, a band of pirates snuck unto his ship and hijacked it, killing the crew left onboard.³⁶

The Americans on shore managed to escape, and with the assistance of a local chief named Po Adam, finally reached other American trading ships in the area and together counter attacked the pirates, allowing for the *Friendship* to be retaken.³⁷ Once the traders had returned home to America, news of the incident immediately generated outrage, yet at the same time the events that transpired in Sumatra remained mysterious to the traders, the American public, and the American government (then led by President Andrew Jackson) alike, since this attack was the first of its kind. Why did it happen in the first place?

Within Sumatra itself, the Sultanate of Aceh immediately investigated the incident. In his book on Acehnese diplomatic history, M. Nur El Ibrahimy writes that there were two probable main causes that led to the attack on *Friendship*. One is Acehnese anger at American pepper traders that cheated them out of pepper using a tampered scale. Apparently this happened often enough as to cause considerable losses to the Acehnese pepper suppliers. Sacks of pepper that the Americans bought suddenly

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. As a consequence of his assistance to the Americans, Po Adam later had to face not just shunning and ridicule, but also threats to his life as well from his own people, as he wrote in a letter to Salem trader Joseph Peabody.

became mysteriously heavier when the Americans sold it to other Acehnese, causing no small amount of resentment. The other cause, as the Acehnese investigation reveals, is the Dutch colonial government's intrigue to interfere in the pepper trade. Apparently the "pirates" that attacked the *Friendship* had been mercenaries in Dutch service that the colonial government contracted to smear Aceh's reputation, painting it as incompetent at best and treacherous at worst. At the time of the attack these pirates used a captured Acehnese ship and flew the flag of the Aceh Sultanate.³⁸

Whether or not the results of the Acehnese inquiry ever reached the United States government was not certain. But in America itself a number of senators that had invested in the *Friendship*'s voyage began to call for military retribution.³⁹

The USS Potomac's expedition to Sumatra

Anyone who has studied American naval history would be familiar with the Barbary Wars. This was the naval expedition launched in response to attacks on American shipping by North African pirates and immortalized in the famous line in the US Marines' Hymn: "To the Shores of Tripoli."

³⁸ M Nur El Ibrahimy, *Selayang Pandang: Langkah Diplomasi Kerajaan Aceh* (Jakarta: Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia, 1993), 23-24. However, Ibrahimy does not provide evidence for either theory or even if the Acehnese Sultan ordered an investigation at all. Instead, David F. Long, in his article "'Martial Thunder': The First Official American Armed intervention in Asia", supplied Endicott's account that pointed to widespread cheating by both Acehnese and Americans as the cause, with the former frequently adulterating their pepper with rocks or sand and the latter by using irregular weights. (David F. Long, "'Martial Thunder': The First Official American Armed Intervention in Asia," *Pacific Historical Review* 42, no. 2 (1973): 143-62, doi:10.2307/3638464. 146-147)

³⁹ Spector, "The American Image of Southeast Asia 1790-1865, a Preliminary Assessment." 300. By the time of the *Friendship* incident, there was already enough knowledge of the region to form an American perception of Southeast Asia. Spector wrote in his article, "In general, most American observers saw the nations of Southeast Asia as extremely backward in the extreme." American attitudes, however, greatly varied. Merchants did not seek new trading posts or privileges for Americans, but Navy officers such as Commodore Matthew Perry saw that America would inevitably need to intervene in Southeast Asia. Missionaries also had mixed opinions on colonialism, yet agreed that contact with America could serve to bring civilization to Southeast Asia.

So it is no surprise then, that with the Barbary pirates' defeat still fresh in national memory, President Jackson authorized a naval expedition to inflict punishment on the Sumatran bandits that attacked the *Friendship*. The vessel chosen for this endeavor was the *USS Potomac*. Originally assigned only to go to Britain, it now received orders to go to Sumatra instead.

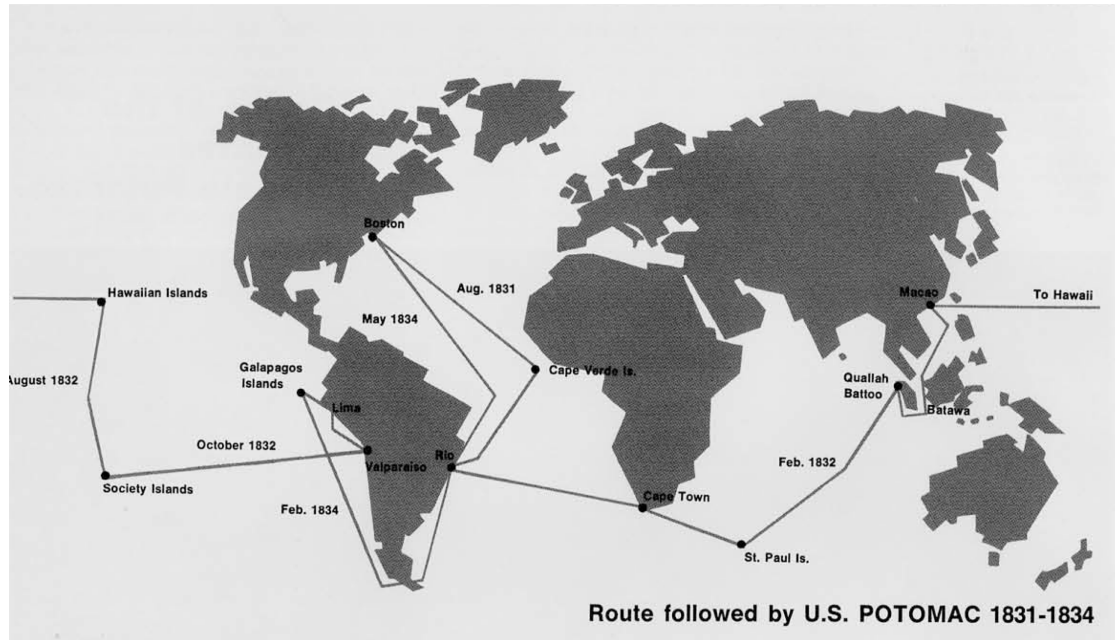


Figure 1: Map of the *USS Potomac's* expedition⁴⁰

Francis Warriner, a schoolmaster charged with educating the midshipmen aboard the *Potomac*, put the entire voyage into writing.⁴¹ Warriner relates the abrupt change in attitude among American maritime merchants, stating that, “for several years, the deportment of the natives of that island toward our countrymen, had become more and

⁴⁰ Karen Goodrich-Hedrick and John D. Hedrick, “Cruise of the United States Frigate *Potomac*,” *Expedition Magazine* 14.2 (1972): 28.

⁴¹ Ibid. 29. One should keep in mind that the United States Naval Academy was only established in 1845. Before that it was the usual practice for the sons of naval officers to train aboard vessels as midshipmen from a very early age, perhaps as young as ten, hence the need for a schoolmaster to accompany the *Potomac's* expedition.

more treacherous.”⁴² While he does not explain the immediate cause of the attack on *Friendship*, his statement here confirms that the change in American-Acehnese relations did not happen as a result of one event but was rather the accumulation of several causes throughout the years.

Commodore John Downes, in command of the *Potomac*, received detailed instructions on what to do and accomplish in Quallah Battoo from the Secretary of the Navy Levi Woodbury.⁴³ The commodore was to gather intelligence and exercise all the necessary precautions before considering armed engagements, and he ordered the crew to conceal the ship’s armaments as they approached Sumatra after the ship crossed the Atlantic, and even hoisted Danish colors, making the ship appear as though it were “a large Indiaman.”⁴⁴ For his part Warriner continued to write down his observations of the Sumatran coast, and his writings revealed a keen observer who was not dismissive of detail. For instance, when he discussed the indigenous inhabitants of Aceh he accurately concluded that, “The inhabitants, in general terms, are denominated Malays, though this is incorrect, as there are several aboriginal tribes, in the interior, who are pagan. The term Malay, among the people, is synonymous with that of Mohammedan.”⁴⁵

⁴² Francis Warriner, *Cruise of the United States Frigate Potomac Round the World During the Years 1831-1834. Embracing the Attack on Quallah-Battoo with Notices of Scenes, Manners, Etc., in Different Parts of Asia, South America, and the Islands of the Pacific* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Company; Crocker & Brewster, 1835). 11.

⁴³ Goodrich-Hedrick and Hedrick, “Cruise of the United States Frigate Potomac,” 33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 71.

⁴⁵ Warriner, *Cruise of the United States Frigate Potomac Round the World During the Years 1831-1834. Embracing the Attack on Quallah-Battoo with Notices of Scenes, Manners, Etc., in Different Parts of Asia, South America, and the Islands of the Pacific.* 73-74.

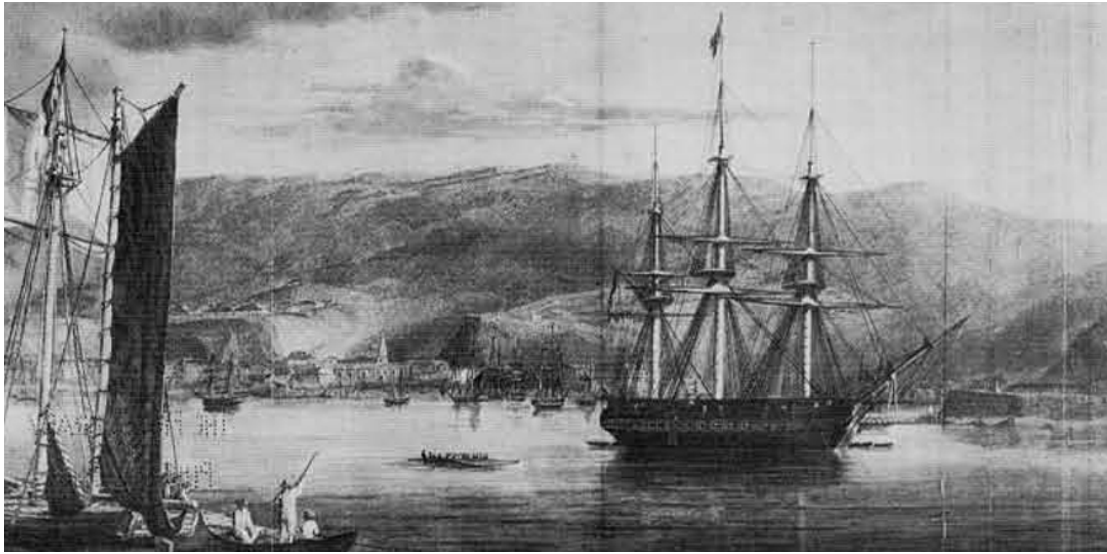


Figure 2: The Frigate *USS Potomac* in Valparaiso Harbor⁴⁶

The *Potomac* continued on its reconnaissance of the Western Acehnese coast, and came across some Acehnese fishermen that offered to sell the Americans their catch. Fearing that the fishermen would alert the pirates to the *Potomac*'s presence, the American sailors decided to detain them. Upon questioning the captured Acehnese identified as being from Tally Pow and not Quallah Battoo.⁴⁷ They would later be released as the *Potomac* completed her mission.

Commodore Downes then decided that the time for armed action had come. Warriner did not mention why Downes chose this course of action, but it is possible that during the voyage to Sumatra he had become convinced that the Acehnese at Quallah Battoo would not cooperate with his investigation.⁴⁸ Ibrahimy criticizes Downes' actions

⁴⁶ Goodrich-Hedrick and Hedrick, "Cruise of the United States Frigate *Potomac*," 33.

⁴⁷ Warriner, *Cruise of the United States Frigate *Potomac* Round the World During the Years 1831-1834. Embracing the Attack on Quallah-Battoo with Notices of Scenes, Manners, Etc., in Different Parts of Asia, South America, and the Islands of the Pacific.* 79-80.

⁴⁸ Jeremiah N. Reynolds, *Voyage Of The United States Frigate *Potomac*: Under The Command Of Commodore John Downes, During The Circum-Navigation Of The Globe, In The Years 1831, 1832, 1833, And 1834* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835). 95-96.

in disguising his ship and sending the *Potomac*'s marine detachment (260 strong) ashore to assault Quallah Battoo, and indeed Downes was later heavily criticized upon his return to the United States.⁴⁹

Jeremiah Reynolds, an American adventurer who had joined the *Potomac* crew as Downes' secretary, described the attack in detail. Downes gave orders to the marines and seamen to cut off all avenues of escape and to force the Quallah Battoo Rajahs to negotiate, but under no circumstances were they to commence hostilities, unless they were attacked first. Only then could the landing party commence full-scale assault on Quallah Battoo, but with strict orders not to harm any unarmed inhabitants.⁵⁰

Around 2:00 AM on February 6th 1832, the marines and seamen of the USS *Potomac* boarded their boats and came ashore on the coast of Quallah Battoo.⁵¹ Though they could not have realized it at the time, this was the very first government-sanctioned American military operation anywhere in Asia.⁵²

It was clear to the marines that they faced a difficult fight. Of the scene's location, Reynolds wrote:

“The town of Quallah-Battoo does not contain less than two thousand inhabitants, and nearly five hundred fighting men. ... It is regularly laid out

Reynolds describes how Downes consulted with British officers in Cape Town, and Ibrahimy writes that the British managed to convince Downes of the slim probability of a peaceful solution. But the British themselves at this time were facing piracy in the Malacca Straits, so it is possible that they deliberately directed Downes to attack Quallah Battoo to have some of the pirates eliminated without having to send any Royal Navy ships. Long, however, suggested that the British had lost interest in Sumatra since the 1824 Anglo-Dutch treaty. (Long, “Martial Thunder.” 146.)

⁴⁹ M. Nur el Ibrahimy, *Selayang Pandang Langkah Diplomasi Kerajaan Aceh* (Jakarta: Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia, 1993). 26-27.

⁵⁰ Reynolds, *Voyage Of The United States Frigate Potomac: Under The Command Of Commodore John Downes, During The Circum-Navigation Of The Globe, In The Years 1831, 1832, 1833, And 1834*. 107.

⁵¹ Ibid. 108.

⁵² Sabri Zain, “The US Attack on Kuala Batu,” accessed May 22, 2016, <http://www.sabrizain.org/malaya/potomac.htm>.

into streets, interspersed with jungle and cocoanut-trees, and contains five forts, each owned and commanded by different rajahs or chiefs.”⁵³

The men did not need to wait long for action. One of the Acehnese in the fort fired off a shot at the marines, thus commencing hostilities. Lieutenant Hoff, one of the marine officers, tried to convince the natives to cease hostilities with what little Malay he learned, but it was in vain.⁵⁴ Now the Americans had to advance against stiff resistance from the Acehnese of Quallah Battoo.

The attack that followed demonstrated well the results of US Marine training and discipline. Though they numbered no more than 260, the marines managed to breach the fort and carry the fight to the Acehnese. Warriner describes the Acehnese last stand inside the fort:

“The resistance of the natives was in vain. The fort was stormed and soon carried; not, however, till almost every individual in it was slain. To’onkou N’yamat, usually called Po Mahomet, a chief of much distinction among the people, who had been principally concerned in the piratical act of taking the Friendship, lost his life at this fort. The mother of Chadoolah, another rajah, was also slain here. Another woman met her death at this fort, but her rank was not ascertained; she fought with the spirit of a desperado.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Reynolds, *Voyage Of The United States Frigate Potomac: Under The Command Of Commodore John Downes, During The Circum-Navigation Of The Globe, In The Years 1831, 1832, 1833, And 1834*. 109-110.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 111.

⁵⁵ Warriner, *Cruise of the United States Frigate Potomac Round the World During the Years 1831-1834. Embracing the Attack on Quallah-Battoo with Notices of Scenes, Manners, Etc., in Different Parts of Asia*,

The fact that many Acehnese women also joined the men in fighting the Americans must have struck Warriner, although Reynolds did not make much mention of the Acehnese women. The number of women who were killed perhaps dismayed Warriner himself, but he noted that the casualties resulted directly from the Acehnese resistance to the marines.⁵⁶



Figure 3: Painting of the assault on Quallah Battoo from the US Marine Corps art collection⁵⁷

South America, and the Islands of the Pacific. 88-89. Ibrahimy condemns the American attack on Quallah Battoo due to the fact that all Acehnese in the fort was killed, but he does not list either Reynolds' or Warriner's account in his bibliography, thus calling the validity of his evaluation of the Quallah Battoo action into question.

⁵⁶ There must have been a tradition of Acehnese women fighting alongside the men against foreign military forces, since it recurred again in the war between Aceh and the Netherlands from 1873 to 1904.

⁵⁷ Colonel Charles H. Waterhouse, USMCR, Charles R. Smith, and Richard A. Long, *Marines in the Frigate Navy: Fourteen Full-Color Prints* (Washington, DC: United States Marine Corps History Division, 2006). 13.

The battle of Quallah Battoo ended with many wounded on the American side, and two men killed.⁵⁸ The loss on the part of the Acehnese is unknown, but it must have been much heavier.

Several Acehnese from the neighboring town of Soo Soo came after the battle to greet the American expedition, bringing gifts as tokens of friendship, and seemed to be rather pleased with the outcome of the Quallah Battoo action.⁵⁹

The marines encountered no further hostility with the locals.

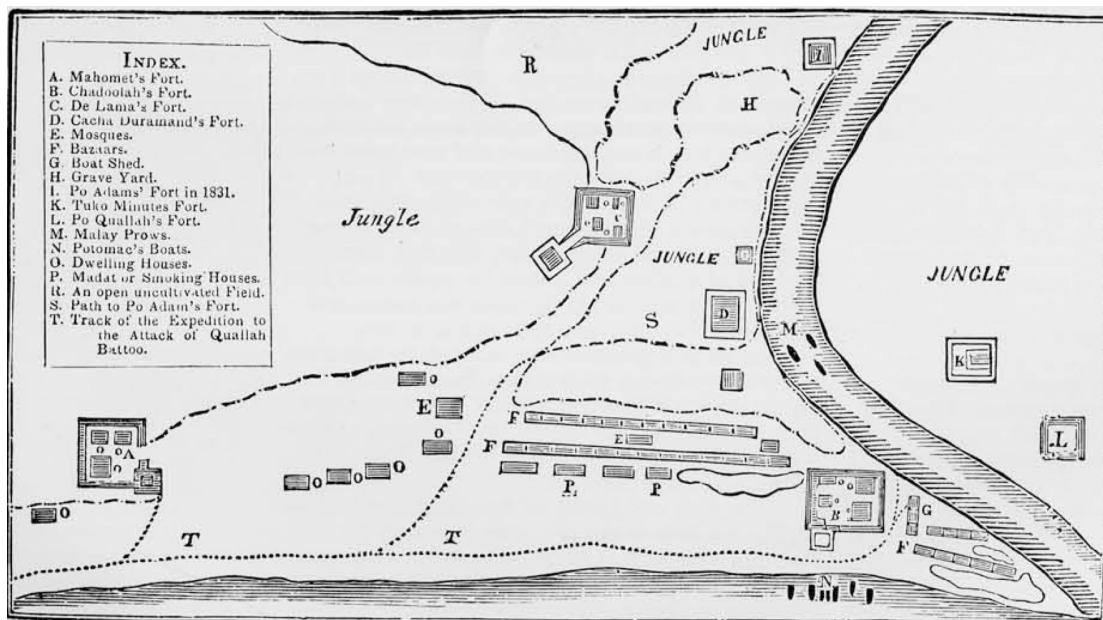


Figure 4: Map of Quallah Battoo and its environs⁶⁰

The next day Downes received the friendly Rajah Po Adam, who had saved the *Friendship's* crew. He revealed to the Americans that he had been observing what

⁵⁸ Warriner, *Cruise of the United States Frigate Potomac Round the World During the Years 1831-1834. Embracing the Attack on Quallah-Battoo with Notices of Scenes, Manners, Etc., in Different Parts of Asia, South America, and the Islands of the Pacific*. 91.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 98-99.

⁶⁰ Goodrich-Hedrick and Hedrick, "Cruise of the United States Frigate Potomac," 31.

happened closely, and for his efforts was treated to a tour of the *Potomac*.⁶¹ Once he left, Downes ordered a bombardment of Quallah Battoo and its surrounding area. This early example of “gunboat diplomacy,” as Ibrahimy called it, made a considerable impression on the Acehnese.⁶² The rest of the *Potomac*’s cruise around the Dutch East Indies consisted mainly of exploring the Sumatran coasts and visiting Java to pay courtesy to the Dutch colonial government there.⁶³ In Batavia Warriner learned of at least one American who went as a missionary to Java, although he could not manage to meet with the man. This was David Abeel, one of the earliest American Protestant missionaries to Southeast Asia and China affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Church and himself a descendant of Dutch colonists.⁶⁴ Just like in the European trade with Southeast Asia, the American pepper trade opened possibilities for missionaries to spread their message as well. Doubtless that this zeal for missionary work partially came from the Second Great Awakening in America, concurrent with this time period at the beginning of the 19th century.

⁶¹ Warriner, *Cruise of the United States Frigate Potomac Round the World During the Years 1831-1834. Embracing the Attack on Quallah-Battoo with Notices of Scenes, Manners, Etc., in Different Parts of Asia, South America, and the Islands of the Pacific*. 109.

⁶² Ibid. 110-111.

⁶³ Ibid. 142-143.

⁶⁴ Thomas G. Oey, “David Abeel, Missionary Wanderer in China and Southeast Asia; with Special Emphasis on His Visit with Walter Henry Medhurst in Batavia, January-June 1831,” in *The Role of the American Board in the World: Bicentennial Reflections on the Organization’s Missionary Work, 1810-2010*, eds. Clifford Putney and Paul T. Burlin (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock: 2012), 147-152.



Figure 5: John Downes, commodore and commanding officer of the Quallah Battoo expedition⁶⁵

The *Potomac* stayed in Batavia until April 10th, and finally departed the Dutch East Indies, its punitive expedition completed. For the Acehnese and the other Sumatrans, however, their troubles with foreign powers were just beginning. The Dutch had been attempting to expand their colonial dominion, and Warriner noted that about ten months after the *Potomac* left Sumatra the Dutch had sent an expedition three thousand strong to another part of the island, probably to follow up on the American expedition. Warriner recounts that the Dutch behaved arrogantly towards the natives, and the resentment culminated in a night ambush on the Dutch expedition, with no apparent survivors, and he himself seems to be surprised that the American expedition suffered not more than two casualties.⁶⁶ After visits to China, some Pacific Islands, and South America, the *Potomac*

⁶⁵ Goodrich-Hedrick and Hedrick, "Cruise of the United States Frigate *Potomac*," 29.

⁶⁶ Warriner, *Cruise of the United States Frigate Potomac Round the World During the Years 1831-1834. Embracing the Attack on Quallah-Battoo with Notices of Scenes, Manners, Etc., in Different Parts of Asia, South America, and the Islands of the Pacific*. 94-95.

finally arrived in Boston on the evening of May 22nd, 1834, after a three-year expedition.⁶⁷

The *Eclipse* and the Second Sumatran Expedition

The Quallah Battoo expedition was a significant attempt by the United States to protect its commerce in Southeast Asia. But it eventually proved to be only a temporary solution to a long-term problem. In 1838, just six years after the Potomac's expedition to Quallah Battoo, another incident of murder occurred, this time with the American merchant vessel *Eclipse*. This was almost a repeat of what happened with the *Friendship*, and two vessels, the *USS Columbia* and the *USS John Adams*, were dispatched to Muckie, not far from Quallah Battoo. Two men that served aboard the *Columbia*, crewmember William Meacham Murrell and Chaplain Fitch Waterman Taylor wrote separate accounts of the incident, which coincidentally occurred just as both frigates were conducting their own global circumnavigation mission, meaning that their response to Acehnese piracy was more immediate.⁶⁸ The report on the *Eclipse* incident reached the *Columbia*'s commanding officer, Commodore George C. Read, via the American consul in Penang.⁶⁹

As with the *Friendship* incident, the *Eclipse* murders occurred due to the ship's crew neglecting to observe necessary precautions. The crew of the *Eclipse* had actually requested that the Acehnese, led by a certain "Lebbey Ousso, juratoolis of Muckie,"

⁶⁷ Ibid. 365-366.

⁶⁸ William Meacham Murrell, *Cruise of the Frigate Columbia Around the World, Under the Command of Commodore George C. Read, 1838, 1839, and 1840* (Boston, Massachusetts: B. B. Mussey, 1840). 86-90.

⁶⁹ Fitch Waterman Taylor, *A Voyage Round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia* (New Haven, Connecticut: H. Mansfield, 1848). 253-257.

surrender their weapons for the duration of the pepper transaction.⁷⁰ But Lebbey Ousso apparently complained afterwards to the captain, a man named Wilkins, and asked for the weapons to be returned while they were still on board. “From his long acquaintance with the man,” the report noted, “the captain did not think that he was doing an act of imprudence by in giving their daggers.”⁷¹ This proved to be his fatal undoing, as the next part of the report shows:

“... The second mate and two sailors were busy in getting ready the scales for weighing the pepper that was on deck. As the second draught was being weighed, the captain, who was seated by a light near the binnacle, cried out, ‘I am stabbed.’ The second mate, who was stooping to take up the bags, was stabbed in the loins. At the same time, the apprentice, who was near the captain, was killed by the very same hand that slew his commander.”⁷²

News of this robbery quickly alerted some other more friendly local Acehnese rulers to go in pursuit of the murderers, but to no avail. The report also notes that although the surviving crewmembers later retook the ship, they had been robbed of everything, and that the ship’s cook, under punishment for insubordination, had switched sides and

⁷⁰ Murrell, *Cruise of the Frigate Columbia Around the World, Under the Command of Commodore George C. Read, 1838, 1839, and 1840*. 87.

⁷¹ Taylor, *A Voyage Round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia*. 256.

⁷² Ibid.

escaped with Ousso's gang.⁷³ With the Acehnese indifferent to their plight, the remaining *Eclipse* crew decided to write to the American consul in Penang.⁷⁴



Figure 6: Hijacking of the *Eclipse*⁷⁵

Word of the outrage galvanized the crew of both the *Columbia* and *John Adams* to prepare for a punitive expedition. But the endeavor came very close to ending before it even had a chance to begin; smallpox began to appear among the crew of the *Columbia*, and at least one crewmember succumbed to the disease.⁷⁶

The *Columbia* then anchored at Annallaboo before moving again. At Quallah Battoo, scene of the infamous incidents only a few years before, Commodore Read welcomed Po Adam, the friendly Rajah. Apparently his help to Americans had not been forgotten, and this time he also gave crucial intelligence to the second Sumatra expeditionary force. He confirmed that the *Columbia* and *John Adams* have anchored at

⁷³ Ibid. 256-257.

⁷⁴ Neither Murrell nor Taylor recorded his name.

⁷⁵ Taylor, *A Voyage Round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia*. 272.

⁷⁶ Murrell, *Cruise of the Frigate Columbia Around the World, Under the Command of Commodore George C. Read, 1838, 1839, and 1840*. 93-97.

the right location, and that the perpetrators of the *Eclipse* incident have sought the protection of the local Rajah.⁷⁷ He also advised the American officers on how to negotiate with the local ruler.⁷⁸

Commodore Read then ordered a group of his officers to come ashore to first speak to the Acehnese before deciding on further action.⁷⁹ Could Read have possibly learned from Downes' experience? This was a significant difference from the first expedition that was characterized by its aggressive approach. There was some concern among the crew that Po Adam might well betray the Americans, even though he had proved to be a trustworthy local ruler, but Read decided to heed his Acehnese ally's advice. Indeed, Po Adam himself personally accompanied the officers that came ashore.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 100.

⁷⁸ Taylor, *A Voyage Round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia*. 268.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 269.



Figure 7: Po Adam, the Rajah who assisted with two American expeditions⁸⁰

They met on the shore “more than a hundred armed Malays.”⁸¹ A tense moment ensued, but Po Adam proved himself once again to be the skilled negotiator he was as he convinced the Acehnese to let the American delegation pass through to interview their chief.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 267.

⁸¹ Ibid.

The first round of negotiations with the Rajah of Quallah Battoo went well. He himself denied none of the facts and promised the American delegation that he would deliver to them the guilty party by the next day.⁸² This done, Po Adam left the Americans, telling them that he will return to assist them again.

Read was anxious since there was no telling that the Rajah will live up to his promise, and decided to be somewhat more forceful. For the second meeting he instructed the negotiating officers as follows:

“You will make known to him that it is the desire of the Government of the United States to remain at peace and on terms of friendship with the chiefs and people of Sumatra; that we have come to the island as friends, and hope that we shall be enabled to leave Kwala Batu in the continuance of the same sentiments. But this must depend upon the readiness which shall be evinced by the Rajah to give up one of the murderers of Captain Wilkins, who, having taken refuge in Kwala Batu, has been protected by the Rajah.”⁸³

When the delegation notified the Rajah in their second interview, the Rajah simply replied that although he had sent his men in pursuit of the culprits, he had not been successful in capturing them.⁸⁴ Murrell wrote in his account of the expedition that this was a blatant lie, that the Rajah had no intention to cooperate in capturing the murderers.

⁸² Ibid. 271.

⁸³ Ibid. 272.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 275.

“His excuses were founded on prevarication,” Murrell wrote. “It was thought advisable to give them a few *iron* arguments by way of bringing them to reason.”⁸⁵

It was about this time that another neighboring Rajah by the name of Po Nyah-heit approached the American officers offering a buffalo and wishing to see Commodore Read himself.⁸⁶ The Americans replied that although they could not take his buffalo, they would hear him out, and Po Nyah-heit proposed that should the Americans take down the Rajah of Quallah Battoo, he would become the new Rajah and favor the Americans. In other words, he was offering to become a client ruler for the United States. It was a tempting offer, yet at this point memories of the Revolutionary War were still fresh in the American imagination, and consequently Read declined this offer but told Po Nyah-heit that he and his family could board the ship and be protected during any hostilities between the United States and Quallah Battoo.⁸⁷

Po Adam also undoubtedly wanted Quallah Battoo and its surroundings wiped off the map by American bombardment, as he had lost much of his domain and fortune as a consequence of his humanitarian assistance to the Americans.⁸⁸ In a conversation with Commodore Read, Po Adam revealed his utter contempt for the Rajah of Quallah Battoo, who he blamed for backing the *Eclipse*’s hijackers and disturbing commerce:

“Rajah is fool. He give up murderer—he give money—then he save pepper-trade. What can Rajah do with pepper—no ships come and buy? He no eat

⁸⁵ Murrell, *Cruise of the Frigate Columbia Around the World, Under the Command of Commodore George C. Read, 1838, 1839, and 1840*. 101.

⁸⁶ Taylor, *A Voyage Round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia*. 277.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ “Massachusetts Historical Society: ‘To the Farthest Ports of the Rich East’: Salem and the Sumatra Pepper Trade,” accessed May 24, 2016, <http://www.masshist.org/object-of-the-month/objects/salem-and-the-sumatra-pepper-trade-2012-08-01>.

pepper. He give up murderer, he have plenty friends in America—they come and buy pepper. But he will no give up Malayu—he fool—he d–n rascal—he buffalo!”⁸⁹

Read then determined that the time for negotiations is over, and that he had to turn to the last resort option: armed confrontation.

On Christmas Day, 1838, the two frigates *Columbia* and *John Adams* commenced their bombardment of Quallah Battoo. The cannonade lasted for thirty minutes before the cease-fire order.⁹⁰ At this point the Acehnese Rajahs came forward and sued for peace. At least two of them, the aforementioned Po Nyah-heit and his relative Po Kwala professed to have had no hand in the *Eclipse* hijacking and that they had no love for Po Chute-Abdullah, the head chief of Quallah Battoo.⁹¹ For Po Nyah-heit, at least, because of his earlier overture, his fort was spared the more furious attack that destroyed the other forts. Never again would the Acehnese of Quallah Battoo endanger American shipping and commerce.

But the principal perpetrators of the *Eclipse* incident still needed to be dealt with. This time the frigates set course for the scene where it occurred: Muckie. Here again, as before, Read sought to use peaceful means first before resorting to military muscle. The Rajahs proved themselves to be even more uncooperative, and for a reason:

⁸⁹Taylor, *A Voyage Round the World, and Visits to Various Foreign Countries, in the United States Frigate Columbia*. 280.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 282-283.

⁹¹ Ibid.

“It was further believed, and affirmed positively by Po Adam, that Lubby Sammon, a man of considerable influence here and a particular friend of the chief Rajah of Muckie, was the instigator; that he induced Lubby Yusuf (Lebbey Ousso?) to select his men, and shared a great part of the booty. This same man is now at Muckie, and will not be given up by the Rajah.”⁹²

On New Year’s Day, 1839, Commodore Read ordered the *Columbia* and *John Adams* to open fire on Muckie. This time no mercy was shown. In addition to the destructive cannonade, Read authorized some 320 marines and armed seamen to commence landing on the shore. Both Murrell and Taylor recorded that the landing was the crushing blow that finally destroyed Muckie and ended Acehnese threat to American merchant ships for good.⁹³ The retaliation seemed to have gotten the message across: the Acehnese need not fear Americans, since the United States had no interest in territorial acquisition, that Americans primarily came as traders, and that the fates that befell Quallah Battoo and Muckie were the results of Acehnese pirates’ predation on or Acehnese Rajahs’ failure to protect Americans. As a result of this use of military force, Read successfully obtained separate agreements from the key Rajahs of Quallah Battoo, Muckie, and Soo Soo promising to never again molest American shipping.⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid. 287.

⁹³ Ibid. 296.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 299-317.



Figure 8: The Assault on Muckie⁹⁵



Figure 9: Commodore George Read, commander of the United States Navy's East India Squadron⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid. (cover plate illustration with no page number)

⁹⁶ "GeorgeC.Read.gif (GIF Image, 145 × 150 Pixels)," accessed May 24, 2016, <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d8/GeorgeC.Read.gif>.

Once Again Conspicuously Absent: The Dutch

At this point a number of important questions come into the narrative. Where were the Dutch? Did they not lay claim to the entire East Indies archipelago? Why did the American government decide to act on its own and send a warship without first consulting the Dutch government in Batavia?

The simplest answer to these problems could only be that the Dutch were too weak to enforce their claim on the East Indies. The first thirty years of Dutch crown rule after the VOC's collapse had not been easy for the Dutch government to handle. Many areas of the archipelago outside Java were claimed, but not controlled by the Dutch.

Three crises that broke out illustrated the Netherlands' struggle. The Java War broke out in 1825 when Prince Diponegoro in what is today Central Java and Yogyakarta rose up against Dutch rule.⁹⁷ Although it was confined to that region of Java alone, the Java War proved to be the costliest colonial war the Dutch fought up to that time in terms of both manpower and materiel.

Outside of Java, the Padri War, triggered by recently returned Hajj pilgrims from the Arabian peninsula, also tied down Dutch military forces and severely limited their ability to respond to piracy and commercial trading rivals alike.⁹⁸ By the time the *Friendship* and *Eclipse* hijacking incidents, The Dutch had already spread their efforts too thin and could do little as British and American merchants dominated the trade with Aceh. The British in particular were vehemently opposed to any attempts at Dutch expansion across Sumatra, and thus were determined to maintain Aceh as a buffer

⁹⁷ See P. B. R. Carey, *Destiny: The Life of Prince Diponegoro of Yogyakarta, 1785-1855* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014) for more on this conflict and its impact on Dutch governance over the East Indies.

⁹⁸ See Jeffrey Hadler, "A Historiography of Violence and the Secular State in Indonesia: Tuanku Imam Bondjol and the Uses of History," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 3 (2008): 971-1010 for an overview of this colonial war.

between Britain's holdings in the Malay Peninsula and those of the Netherlands further south.⁹⁹

Finally, mention must be made as well about the Belgian Revolution.¹⁰⁰ As it broke out just after the close of the Java War in 1830, the events both in Europe and Asia nearly paralyzed the Netherlands. When the Belgians gained independence from Dutch rule, it deprived the latter of even more resources. Thereafter the Netherlands was in a position where it became one of the weakest countries in Europe but the strongest in Southeast Asia, although its hold over the East Indies colony continued to be tenuous and was never completely secure.

Hence the Kingdom of the Netherlands was never in any position of power to interfere with British or American commercial activities until long after the Salem-Sumatra pepper trade had ended. It was VOC bankruptcy that opened the pepper trade to American commerce in the first place, and it was the weakness of the Batavia Government that enabled the United States to act on its own and send warships to Aceh's shores.

⁹⁹ Anthony Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra; Atjeh, the Netherlands, and Britain, 1858-1898*. (Kuala Lumpur; New York: University of Malaya Press; Oxford University Press, 1969). 17-18.

¹⁰⁰ G. W. T. Omond, "The Question of the Netherlands in 1829-1830," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 2 (1919): 150-71, doi:10.2307/3678256. The Belgian Revolt was the result of tensions between the northern and southern parts of the Low Countries and ended any hope for a single united government for what are today called the Benelux countries.

Epilogue: Further American Presence in the East Indies

Although the Quallah Battoo and Muckie expeditions brought peace to American merchants coming into Sumatra, the pepper trade between Salem and the ports of Aceh was not to last much longer. Other than the orders of Naval officers, there was no official policy on protecting the Sumatra pepper trade. The trade itself was in decline after the 1807 embargo, followed by the War of 1812, and the last bulk shipment of pepper arrived in Salem onboard the brig *Lucilla* in 1846, an event that marked the end of a trade that had made Salem so rich it was named as the “Venice of North America” and even directly influenced the design of Salem’s city seal.¹⁰¹



Figure 10: Salem's city seal adorning the city hall annex (Author's photo)

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Despite Salem's more famous history as the location of the 17th-century witch trials, no pilgrim or witch adorned its city seal. Instead, an oriental looking figure is presented at the center, with tropical surroundings and a merchant vessel in the background. According to the official explanation by Salem's city government, the seal is meant to depict a native Acehnese that the Salem merchants traded with for so many decades before the pepper trade finally stopped in 1846.¹⁰² The motto surrounding the Acehnese reads, "Divitis Indiae, Usque Ad Ultimum Sinum," meaning "to the farthest ports of the rich east."¹⁰³ In fact, so many ships came from Salem to Sumatra that even Po Adam "believed Salem to be a country by itself, and one of the richest and most important sections of the globe."¹⁰⁴ So much of Salem was built with the profits of this trade, the best example being the Peabody Essex Museum that incorporates the old East India Marine Hall, home to the trading society with the same name that gave rise to the Salem pepper trade, and that started with objects brought back from Sumatra by the pepper traders.

Yet the end of the pepper trade did not mean the end of American interest in maritime Southeast Asia. In 1852, just six years after the end of the Salem pepper trade, American filibusterer Walter Murray Gibson made perhaps the only serious effort by any American to acquire territory in the East Indies.¹⁰⁵ He attempted to meddle in local affairs by siding with the Jambi Sultanate against the Dutch colonial government, even declaring

¹⁰² "Salem Massachusetts - Municipal Information At a Glance." Salem ships so dominated the pepper trade that Australians of the early 19th century referred to peppercorns as "Salem pepper."

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Warriner, *Cruise of the United States Frigate Potomac Round the World During the Years 1831-1834. Embracing the Attack on Quallah-Battoo with Notices of Scenes, Manners, Etc., in Different Parts of Asia, South America, and the Islands of the Pacific*. 109.

¹⁰⁵ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Sumatran Sultanate and Colonial State: Jambi and the Rise of Dutch Imperialism, 1830-1907*, Studies on Southeast Asia, no. 37 (Ithaca, N.Y: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2003). 101.

in his letter to the Sultan that the United States would intervene in his favor.¹⁰⁶ This was a mistake, as the United States Navy's presence in the Pacific Ocean was primarily concerned with protecting commerce. Not until 1898 would America would join the imperialist wave with the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection.



Figure 11: Walter Murray Gibson as Prime Minister of the Hawaii Kingdom, around 30 years after his adventure in Jambi¹⁰⁷

Even so, the nervous Dutch government took Gibson seriously, and the mere presence of America's East India Squadron stationed in Hong Kong was enough to make the colonial government to take precautionary measures against any American encroachment. The Dutch decided to arrest Gibson, jail him, and put him on trial. But this

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 102.

¹⁰⁷ "WalterMurrayGibson2.jpg (JPEG Image, 744 × 1025 Pixels) - Scaled (33%)," accessed May 24, 2016, <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b1/WalterMurrayGibson2.jpg>.

did not stop Gibson, as he escaped custody in April 1853.¹⁰⁸ He might have failed in his adventure, but “because of Gibson, the US public took a greater interest in the Indonesian archipelago in the 1850s than at any other time in the nineteenth century.”¹⁰⁹ Gibson’s effort also threw light on how the Dutch jealously guarded its territories and monopolistic trading practices; his meddling forced the Dutch to loosen their commercial restrictions somewhat. Gibson himself would go on to have more filibustering adventures, eventually achieving briefly in Hawaii what he could not gain in Jambi.¹¹⁰

The 1861-1865 American Civil War, of course, diverted United States attention to domestic affairs and thus for a time diminished its presence in the international arena. But the last chapter of American presence in 19th century Southeast Asia before 1898 unfolded seven years after the War Between the States ended.

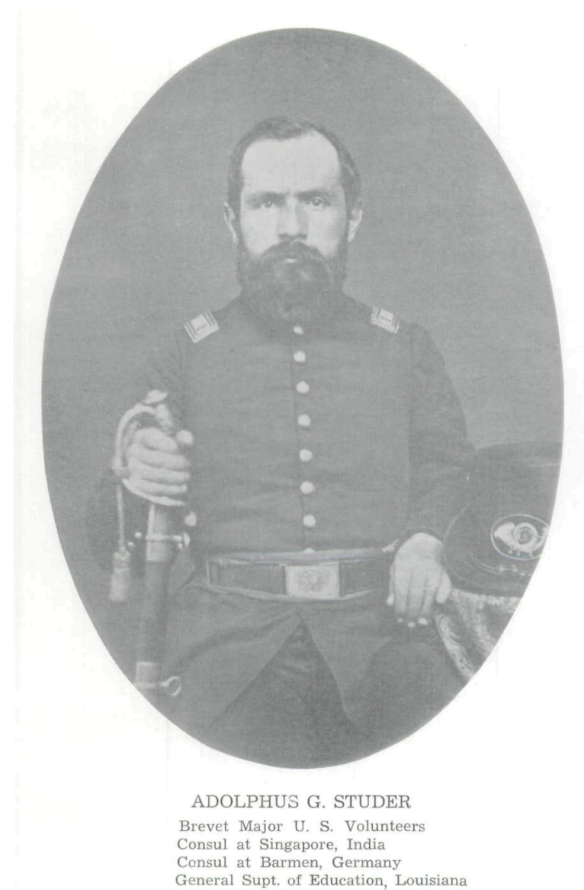
In September 1871, a new American consul arrived in Singapore to take up his post. This was Brevet Major Adolphus G. Studer, formerly of the 15th Iowa Infantry in the Civil War.¹¹¹ His appointment coincided with a period when America was reconsidering a revival of the pepper trade with Aceh, probably to help with the costs of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

¹⁰⁸ Locher-Scholten, *Sumatran Sultanate and Colonial State*. 102

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 111.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 108.

¹¹¹ James Gould, “Did an Iowan Start a War in the Indies?,” *The Annals of Iowa* 34, no. 2 (October 1, 1957): 80–99.



ADOLPHUS G. STUDER
Brevet Major U. S. Volunteers
Consul at Singapore, India
Consul at Barmen, Germany
General Supt. of Education, Louisiana

Figure 12: Brevet Major Adolphus G. Studer, United States Consul in Singapore¹¹²

This was also the time period when the Dutch were beginning their encroachment on Aceh, but Aceh's strategic position and the ever watchful eye of the British prevented the pro-war Dutch officials in the Indies from carrying out their designs in Aceh. Eventually, however, an opportunity presented itself when the Dutch Consul in Singapore, William H. Read, secretly conspired with Acehnese turncoat Teungku Arifin. The Dutch needed an excuse to land troops in Aceh, and there was no better way to accelerate that process than to make it seem as if Aceh itself was preparing for war by seeking alliances with countries represented at Singapore.

¹¹² Ibid.

Arifin then approached Consul Studer during the summer of 1872, and asked if the United States could assist him in his effort to regain his throne, to which Studer replied in the negative, as America lacked interest in overseas territorial expansion.¹¹³ Yet not long after, in September, an official delegation from Aceh led by Tibang Muhammad arrived to ask for American assistance in pressuring the Dutch against any colonial war.¹¹⁴

At this point Studer probably thought that the Acehnese would revive trade with America in exchange for American help against Dutch encroachment. Studer even posited to Rear Admiral Thornton Alexander Jenkins, commander of the United States Navy's East India Squadron, to stop over at Aceh, something Jenkins prudently declined to do.¹¹⁵ The Acehnese delegation returned a short time later with a treaty proposal, a document now in America's National Archives. What followed afterwards was an intrigue in which Read and Arifin managed to persuade the Dutch government in Batavia that Aceh's search for aid had borne fruit and that the United States (and to a lesser extent the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Italy as well) was ready to aid the Acehnese, thus threatening Dutch sovereignty.¹¹⁶ The Dutch then had a ready excuse to attack Aceh, and concocted a story in which Consul Studer became one of the scapegoats for the acceleration in Dutch aggression that started the Aceh War. It would not be until 1957 that historian James Warren Gould would be able to clear him from any wrongdoings.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Ibid. 87.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 88.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 89.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 91-93.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 98.



Figure 13: Rear Admiral Thornton Alexander Jenkins, commander of the United States Navy's East India Squadron¹¹⁸

Conclusion

From the sketches of American interactions with the East Indies above one can certainly say that neither America nor the East Indies were isolated from one another. The thriving pepper trade testified to America's zeal in pursuing commerce as a means of nation building, and for the Acehnese it proved that they could build upon the relationships that grew out of trade. But the trade was disrupted by the twin incidents of

¹¹⁸ "Thornton_Jenkins.JPG (JPEG Image, 188 × 339 Pixels)," accessed May 24, 2016, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/e/ed/Thornton_Jenkins.JPG.

Quallah Battoo and Muckie, but the resulting American responses only proved that America was already a formidable power even as a young republic and Aceh as the territory that refused to submit to Dutch rule, marking the start of strong bilateral relations to come. The strong connections between Indonesia and the United States came to the fore again when Indonesia declared its independence in 1945. The United States threatened to cut off Marshall Plan aid to the Netherlands unless it agreed to recognize Indonesian sovereignty, an important episode in Indonesian independence.

Though sporadic, the United States of America's interactions with the East Indies opened new opportunities for American trading activity and led to a booming business in pepper. Until President Jefferson signed the 1807 Embargo Act into law, the trade in spices and shipping services was a sign that even if militarily America was not yet a global superpower that it is today, it was most definitely a rising economic power.

America's moment in the East Indies came as the old VOC order in the region collapsed under the weight of its own failure to enforce its monopoly, which left many regions such as Aceh independent. Merchants from Salem were only too happy to seize the advantage of trading pepper directly from its source, circumventing whatever was left of the old VOC monopoly. That the Salem-Sumatra pepper trade not only took place, but also boomed in the years coinciding with the VOC's bankruptcy, is a sign of the end for the age of monopolistic commerce that began in 1602 with the establishment of the VOC.

The VOC's replacement, the Dutch crown, however, took steps to defend its territorial claims in the East Indies. That it fought both the Java and Padri Wars at the same time signaled a new attitude on the part of the government in Batavia. It saw that the protection of its exclusive economic rights and territorial sovereignty as inextricably

linked, and was why the post-VOC Batavia government vigorously pursued territorial expansion. Thus American presence in Southeast Asia can be seen as a wake-up call for the Dutch to actually control what they claimed in the first place.

And as they no doubt saw the military power of the young United States, the Dutch took note as well that their claim over the East Indies was moot if they could not enforce it by force of arms. Though the Dutch were too weak to do anything but protest American punitive expeditions to Sumatra, by the start of the Aceh War their colonial army had become much stronger. The fact that Arifin and Read managed to cause alarm in Batavia by implying the possibility of American territorial expansion in Aceh showed that the Batavia Government never felt comfortable with American naval presence off the Sumatran coasts, and that even the remote possibility of an American-Acehnese treaty was reason enough to start a war with Aceh.

While the Salem pepper trade took place firmly within an age when colonialism was on the rise, American interactions with Aceh in the early days of the United States should be seen as a sign that the young republic strove to differentiate itself from other Western powers in that American traders came purely to engage in the pepper commerce. True, among some US Navy officers there was discussion about joining other colonial powers in pursuing overseas territorial expansion.¹¹⁹ But time and again, whenever American Navy ships showed up off the coast of Sumatra, their officers refused all offers from the native rulers for protectorate treaties or to go beyond their mission parameters.

The narrative of the Salem-Sumatra Pepper Trade, the two Sumatra expeditions, and the Singapore affair shows that the role of the United States in Southeast Asian history was much larger and started long before the Spanish-American War and the

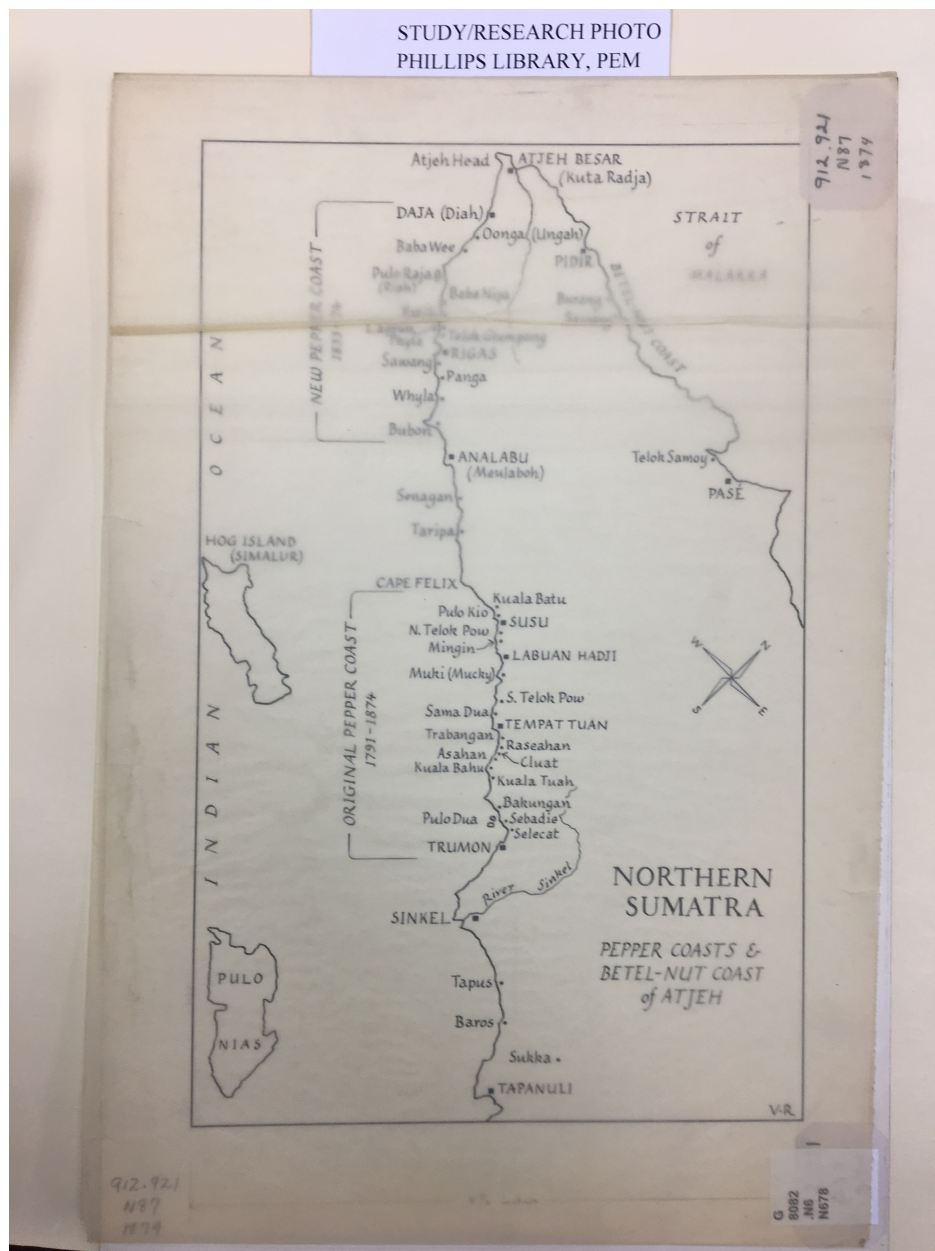
¹¹⁹ Spector, "The American Image of Southeast Asia 1790-1865, a Preliminary Assessment." 304.

Philippine Insurrection. The coming of the Salem merchants to Aceh was the end of the spice trade monopoly, an obsolete, unsustainable system represented by the VOC that was replaced by the more enduring free-market capitalism.

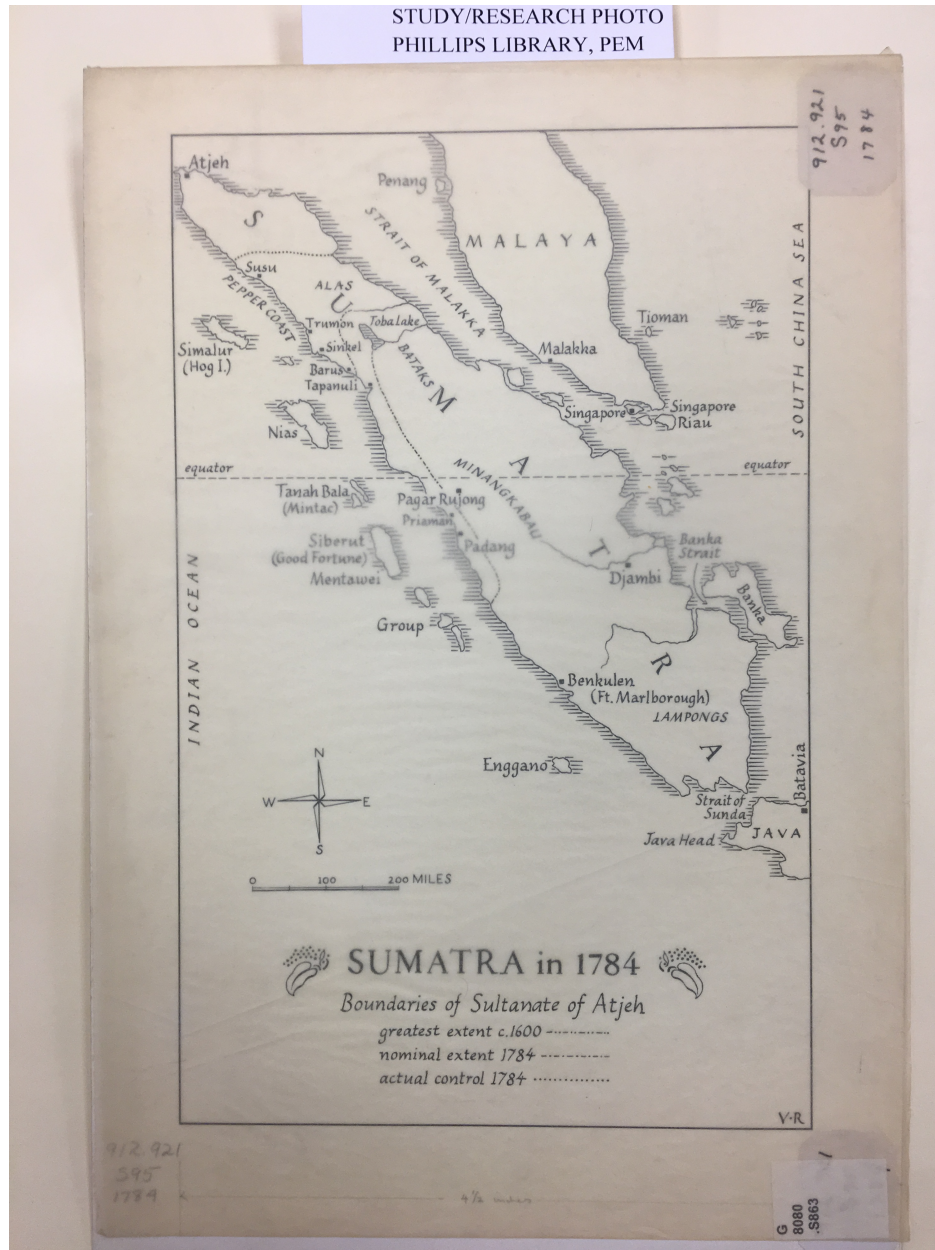
Far from being isolated from one another, the United States and Southeast Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries saw intense interactions exemplified by the encounters on the western coasts of Aceh. While the Manifest Destiny would define America's domestic character, the Salem pepper trade would be the foundation of its international outlook, a legacy that continues to resonate to the present day.

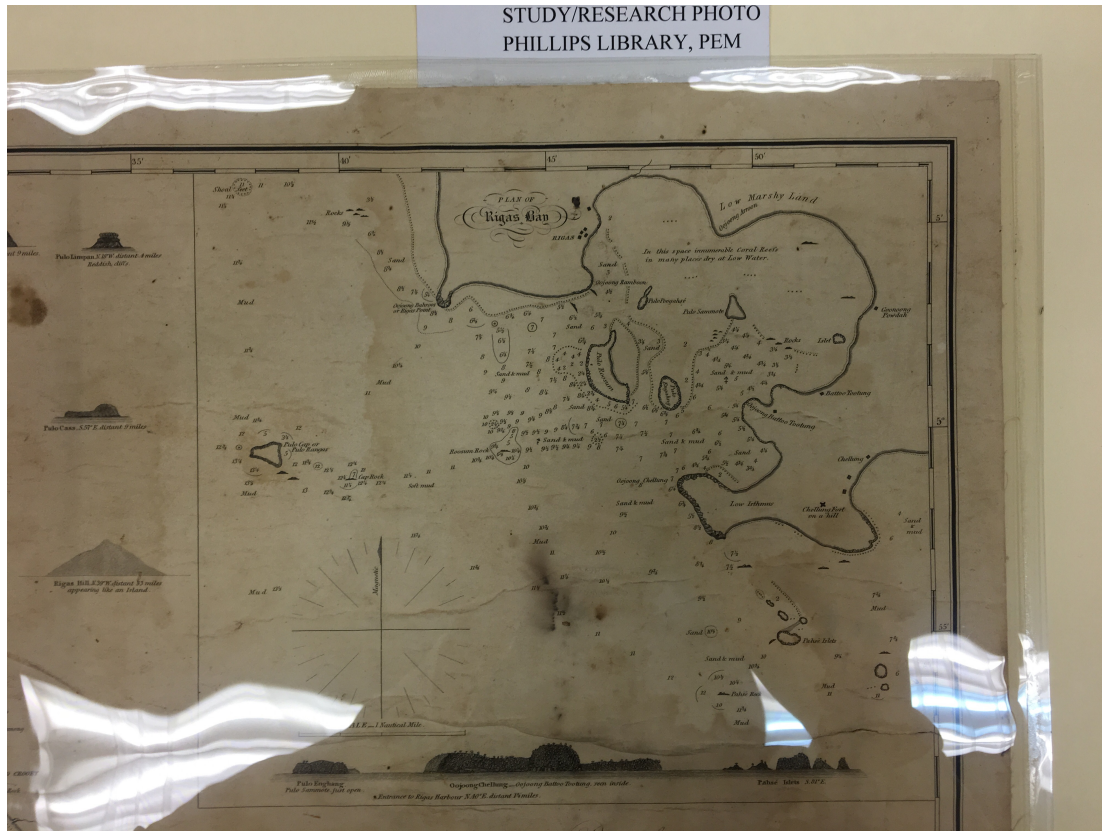
Appendix: Maps

The following images are maps and their insets showing the locations of pepper trading activities between the Salem merchants and the Acehnese. Some of the more obscure place names vary in spelling, but major ports such as Annalaboo and Quallah Battoo are more consistent. All maps are courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum's Phillips Library (at the time of writing still in the relocated reading room in Peabody, Massachusetts).

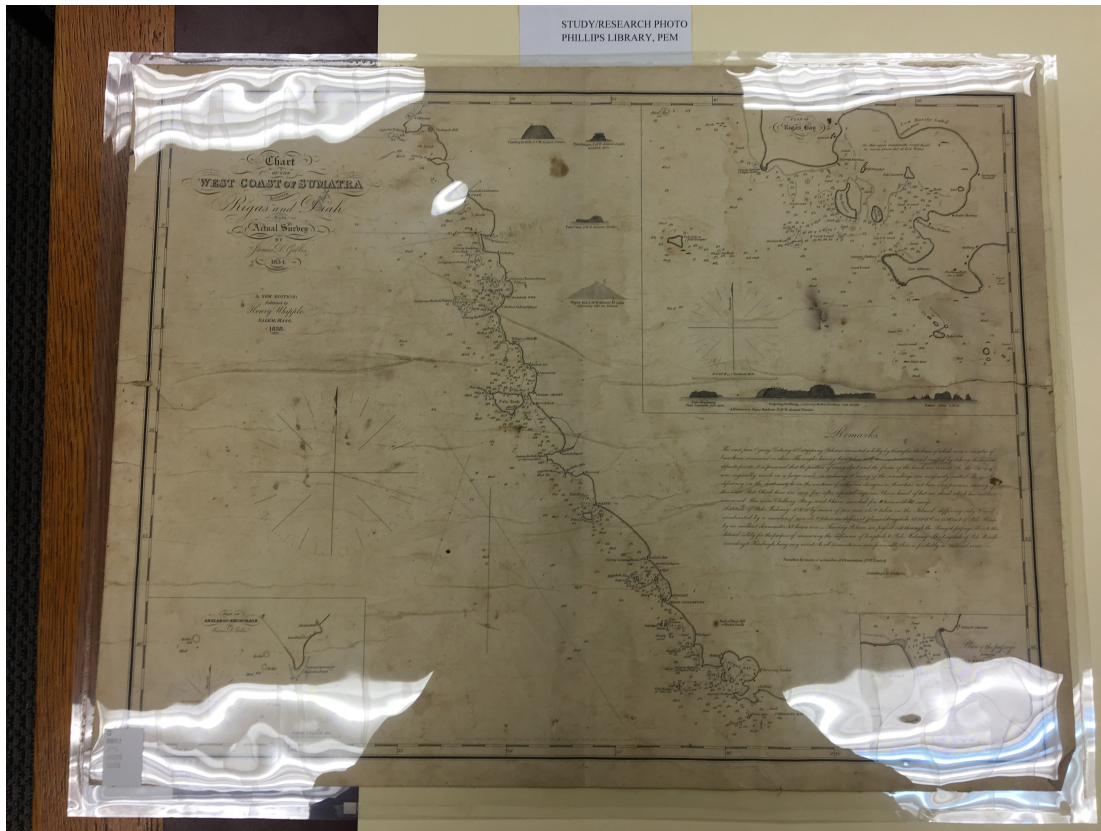


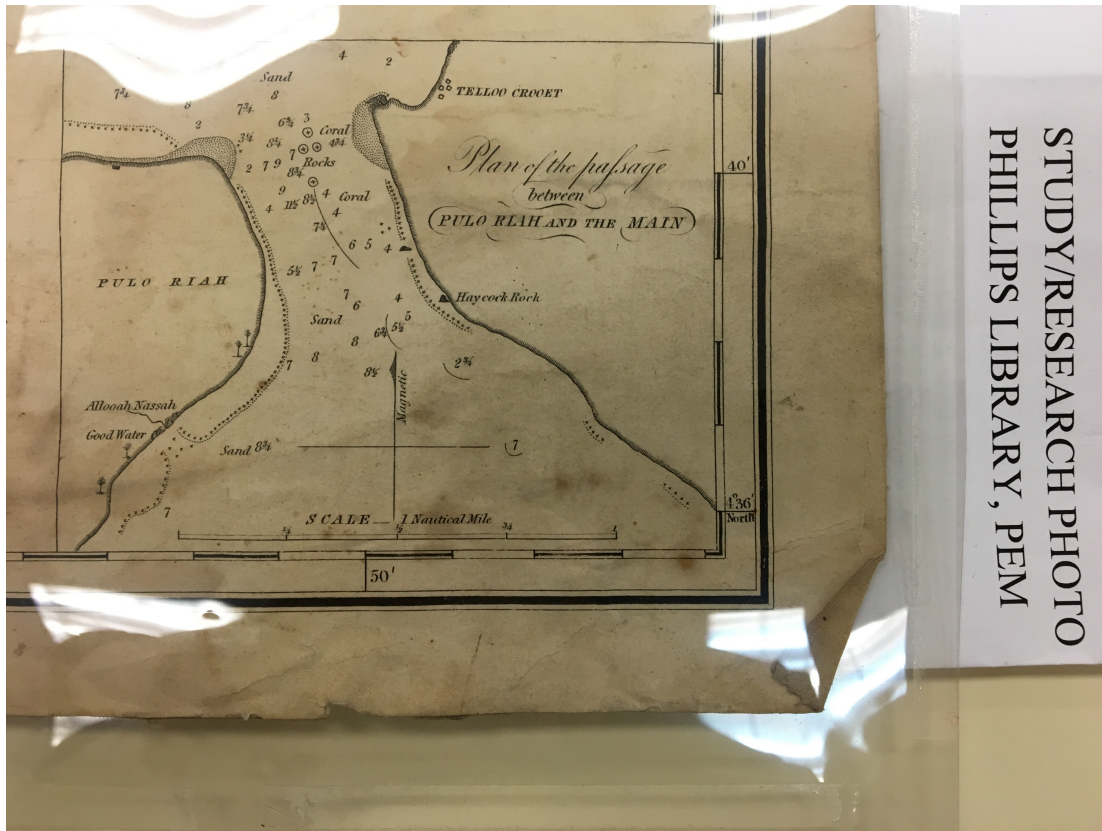
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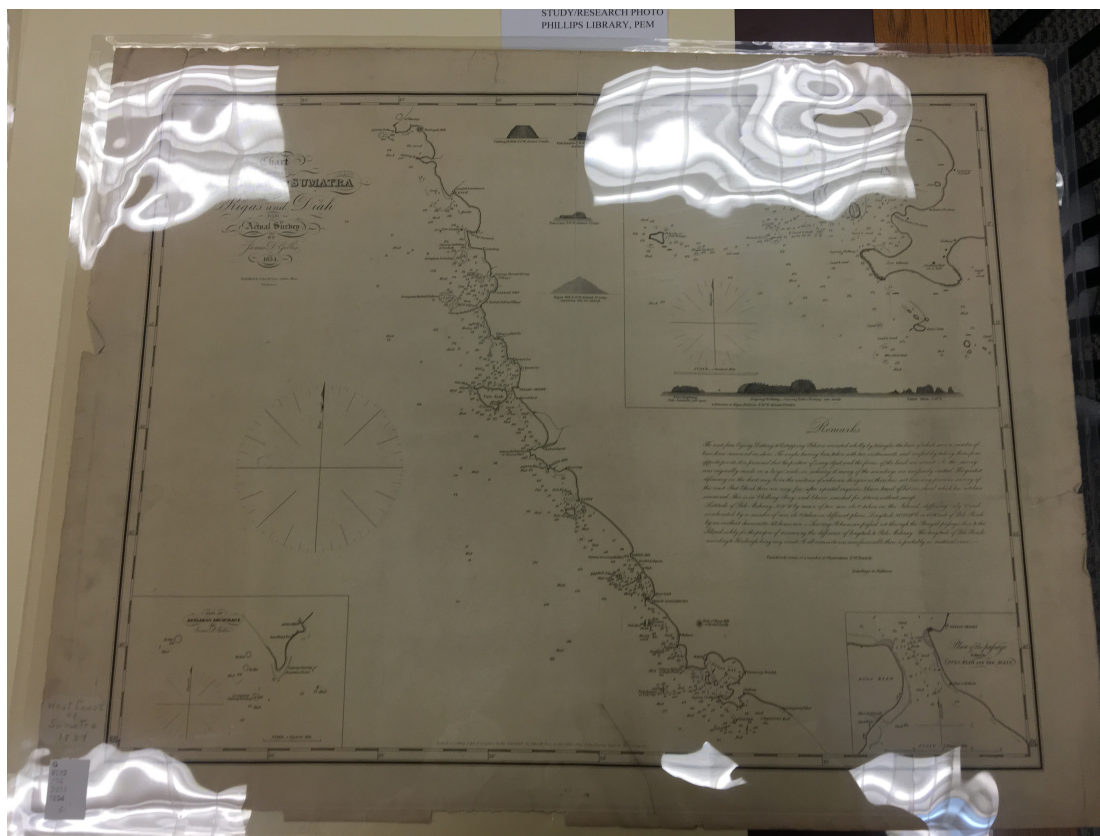


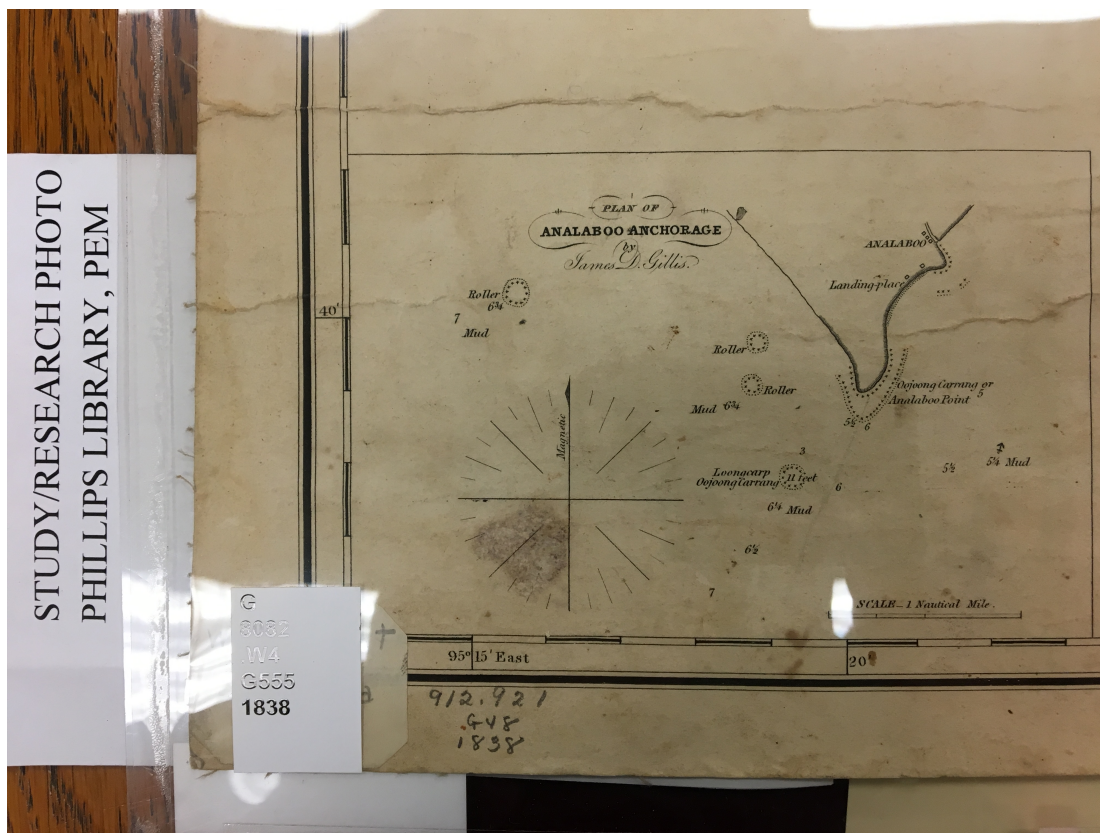
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Appendix Maps

- 1784 Map of Sumatra showing the boundaries of the Sultanate of Atjeh
1784 (?) Map of Northern Sumatra, pepper coasts, and betel-nut coast of Atjeh
1833 Map of Sumatra's west coast by Charles M. Endicott

1834 Edition of chart of the West Coast of Sumatra Between Rigas and Diah from actual survey by James D. Gillis, published by John M. Ives of Salem, Massachusetts
1838 Revised edition of Gillis' map published by Henry Whipple of Salem, Massachusetts

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